



Review of 'Domesticity at War'

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Domesticity at War



Beatriz Colomina

Domesticity at War

Modern architecture is inseparable from war. It recycles the techniques and materials developed for the military. The postwar form of domesticity turns out to be a powerful weapon. Expertly designed images of domestic bliss are launched throughout the entire world as part of a carefully orchestrated campaign.

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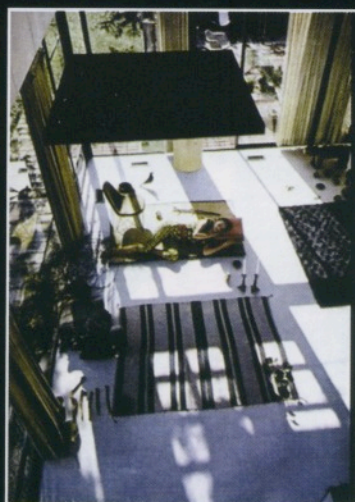
Reach for the frying pan; it's war in the kitchen. Well, not just in the kitchen, but everywhere at home. Beatriz Colomina's new book traces this uncomfortable relationship between war (WW2) and the evolution of our contemporary homes. Beginning after the second world war, the distribution of iconic images of American domestic bliss "was a carefully orchestrated campaign", to influence modern architecture and generations of new home owners. Your country needs... your home.

After 1945 the American war machine was transformed and redirected into a huge consumer manufacturing and production system, where logistics, prefabrication, propaganda and assembly lines were to do battle in suburbia. As Colomina describes, it was "missiles into washing

machines". Europe was invaded this time with a barrage of images from 'Time', 'Life' and 'Better Homes and Gardens' magazines, that induced an almost hypnotic love affair with the American home and lifestyle.

For a period Europe (and most of the world) turned to the US and desperately wanted everything American. The new wave of American design in tandem with the huge post war production capacity, was to have a significant influence on the direction of contemporary architecture.

Colomina returns to her formative years and unravels the effect the arrival of these American popular magazines had on the creative psyche of her parents -which in



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California's Bold Look

IT IS NEW, BRIGHT AND ROUND TO BE SEEN ALL OVER THE U.S.

THE NEW, BRIGHT AND ROUND TO BE SEEN ALL OVER THE U.S. IT IS NEW, BRIGHT AND ROUND TO BE SEEN ALL OVER THE U.S. IT IS NEW, BRIGHT AND ROUND TO BE SEEN ALL OVER THE U.S.

turn would influence and shape her own career as an architect.

In this book she has carefully researched the work of post-war architects and designers and has placed this in the context of popular domestic image making. An array of famous architects: Buckminster Fuller, Charles and Ray Eames, Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, the Smithsons, Philip Johnson and Walter Gropius, all weave in and out of the photographs and text and are

connected by nine specific case study sections. These can all be read independently of each other, but together they build up a unique picture of the period.

Her research on Charles and Ray Eames through this post war period, is perhaps best illustrative of the main theme of the book and central to her own interests. Beginning with the plywood leg

splints commissioned for the American navy in 1942 through to their own house at Santa Monica, their unique design philosophy, was to have a big impact on European design. Peter and Alison Smithson described their house as

"a cultural gift parcel received here at a particularly useful time." The mass produced plywood splints for war -which started their career-become key to developing their iconic furniture.

Colomina asks some interesting questions. Had the war created an aesthetic sensibility? Would those returning from it expect a more modern world of clean functional beauty? Such are the paradoxes where design and life are intertwined, for good or bad.

The book design creates a deliberate split between words and images (the binder is cut horizontally making it two books in one) to draw our attention to their manipulation. It becomes a sort of image machine where combinations and juxtapositions of photographs and text can be created like a visual puzzle. But Colomina's writing is a good counter to this quirky object and makes this book accessible to anyone intrigued about this period -with or without a professional interest. Like her previous book 'Privacy and Publicity' she explores the importance of the media and image making in the history of design. The propaganda strategies



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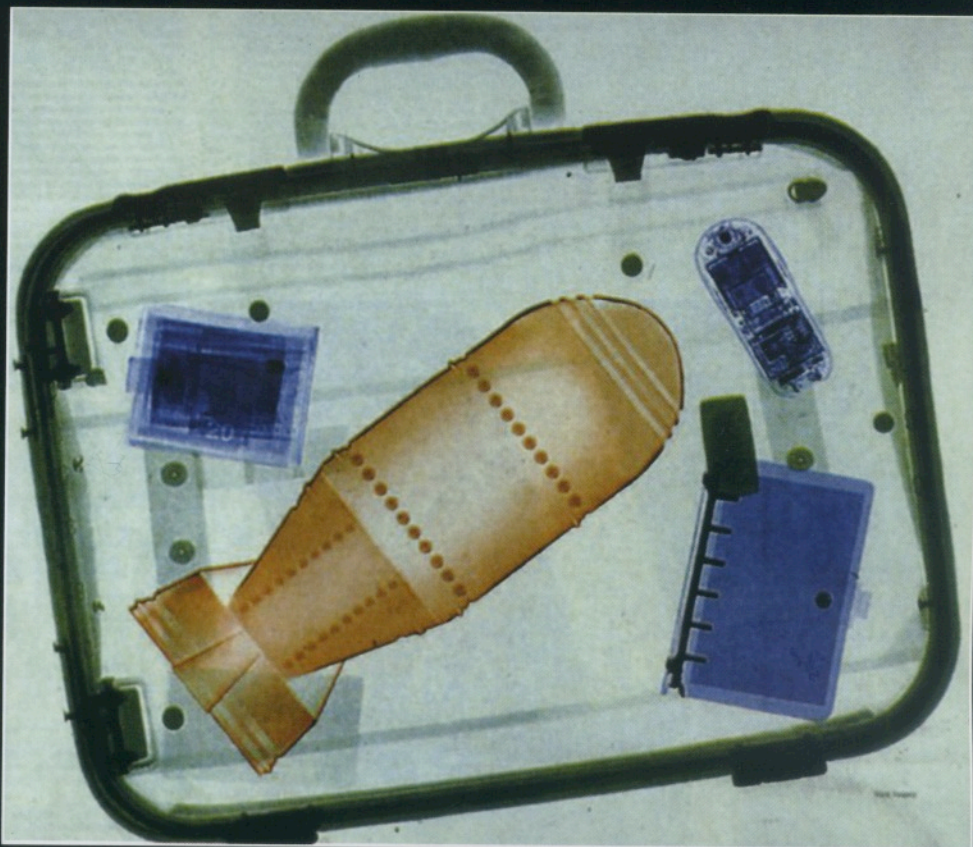


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of war, becomes the publicity machine of design. As a closing epilogue Colomina's experience of 9/11 (she lived within 200 yards of the twin towers) and subsequent awareness of the media coverage of the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, brings her research into immediate uncomfortable perspective. Now CNN "brings war direct into your living room...". But as she describes, the dilemma now is. "War does not end. It evolves, and architecture with it." As this book shows, try as we might to dispel this fact, the evidence is all around us, and by design, brings it home.

Paul Clarke

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Beatriz Colomina
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